

The Future Role of the Regional LLCs

The Local Number Portability Administration Selection Working Group report to the NANC (with the accompanying Architecture and Administrative Plan for Local Number Portability) raises a legal issue on which the Lawyers' Group has been unable to achieve consensus. This relates to the proposal to give the various regional LLCs continuing responsibility to oversee and manage the activities of the local number portability administrators ("LNPA's"). This proposal is inconsistent with the Commission's orders and its direction to the NANC.

The report proposes that each LNPA "be established under the Regional LLC" and that the LLC "manage" the LNPA. This specifically includes "ongoing direction of the third party's activities," ensuring that the prices charged by the LNPA are consistent with Commission directives and prioritizing the LNPA's work efforts. See Arch & Admin Plan ¶¶ 12.2.1-2.

This would appear to be inconsistent with the Commission's direction. The Commission ordered that the LNPAs must be "neutral third parties," in particular, that they must be "independent, non-governmental entities that are not aligned with any particular telecommunications industry segment." *Number Portability Order* ¶¶ 92, 93. The entities that the LLCs have selected fit this bill. However, the total arrangement is not impartial if the LNPA is "established under," is "managed" by and is accountable on a day-to-day basis to a joint venture of telecommunications carriers.

The language the Commission used to describe the impartiality of the LNPAs is the same as it had used to describe the new NANPA in paragraph 57 of the *Number Administration Order*. This indicates that the same degree of independence and freedom from industry influence is required for LNPAs as for the new NANPA. If it is not consistent with the Commission's direction (or with section 251(e)(1) of the Communications Act) if the new NANPA were "managed" by a joint venture of telecommunications carriers, then it is not consistent with the Commission's direction to establish the LNPAs in that way either.

The LNPA Working Group report (¶ 4.4) argues that the LLCs are, in fact, competitively neutral. The heart of the argument is that the LLCs are open bodies — that any LEC can join and each LEC has an equal vote. This does not cure the problem. If the end result is still an entity that is, in fact, aligned with a particular industry segment, it would fail the test of the Commission's order. While "openness" may indicate neutrality in bodies that operate by consensus, that is not the case in the "majority rules" world of LLCs.

Nor does the fact, relied on by the Working Group, that the LNPA would ultimately be subject to federal and state regulatory oversight cure this problem. This would be the case for any entity that was an LNPA, even a telecommunications carrier. If this were sufficient to ensure neutrality (and the appearance of neutrality), there would

have been no need for the Commission to put any constraints on who could be an LNPA. It should also be noted that this exact same oversight did not protect Bellcore from charges that it was not impartial as NANPA.

There are alternatives to the Working Group's approach:

One model that could be used in place of the LNPA Working Group's proposal is the one already recommended by the NANC for the new NANPA. There were discussions in first meetings of the NANPA Working Group of establishing an LLC to manage the contract with a new NANPA. For a variety of reasons, this idea was rejected, and it was decided instead to establish the new NANPA under Commission regulations.

Another, more regulatory, model would be for the LNPA to tariff access to the number portability SMS. When the FCC considered a service identical to this one (the SMS for 800 service), it found that it was a common carrier communications service that had to be offered under tariff. The reasons given in that order for requiring the tariffing of 800 SMS would appear to apply to number portability SMS services. *Provision of Access for 800 Service*, CC Dkt. 86-10, Order ¶¶ 27-29 (rel. Feb. 10, 1993).

The LLC Issue

Background

In June 1995, the Maryland PSC established a Consortium of carriers to resolve number portability issues in that State. Bell Atlantic has been an active member of the Maryland Consortium, and MCI recently characterized Bell Atlantic's participation as "valuable."

In 1996, before the Commission's *Number Portability Order*, the Maryland Consortium was preparing to draft an RFP for number portability service management system services — what the Commission's *Order* refers to as the Local Number Portability Administrator. A number of Consortium members wanted to form a limited liability corporation to issue the RFP, primarily to shield members from possible liability in connection with the RFP process. Bell Atlantic felt that such a step was unnecessary (and needlessly costly). Bell Atlantic also felt that the "one-company-one-vote" structure put it at an insuperable 5-to-1 voting disadvantage in any decision to be made by the LLC. Bell Atlantic did not join the Maryland LLC, but has continued to participate in its activities to the extent permitted by the LLC members.

The Commission's *Number Portability Order* assigned to the NANC a number of the tasks being undertaken by the Maryland LLC. In particular, the Commission's regulations provide, "The North American Numbering Council (NANC) shall direct establishment of a nationwide system of regional SMS databases for the provision of long-term database methods for number portability." 47 C.F.R. § 52.25(a). They further require the NANC to "select a local number portability administrator(s) (LNPA(s)) to administer the regional databases within seven months of the initial meeting of the NANC." *Id.* § 52.25(c). The NANC is also responsible for making other decisions that will directly effect the implementation of number portability throughout the country, including establishing technical and operational standards:

"The NANC shall determine whether one or multiple administrator(s) should be selected, whether the LNPA(s) can be the same entity selected to be the North American Numbering Plan Administrator, how the LNPA(s) should be selected, the specific duties of the LNPA(s), the geographic coverage of the regional databases, the technical interoperability and operational standards, the user interface between telecommunications carriers and the LNPA(s), the network interface between the SMS and the downstream databases, and the technical specifications for the regional databases." *Id.* § 52.25(d).

In its order, the Commission recognized that activities were already underway in a number of States to implement number portability. These activities included writing technical and operational specifications for number portability databases and, in one case, the actual selection of a number administrator. The order recognized these activities and did not want to disrupt them. For this reason, the Commission established a process to allow an individual State to opt-out of the regional database system in favor of its own

“state-specific database.” 47 C.F.R. § 52.25(g). There is no provision for a multi-state region to opt out of the NANC process.

For this reason, Bell Atlantic concluded that the Commission’s *Order* left no role for regional LLCs and so advised the LLC (and, when asked, State commissions in its territory).

It is important to remember that there is no requirement that a local exchange carrier join an LLC. A LEC can implement portability without joining, and the LNPA’s services are available to all carriers, not just to LLC members.

The Issue Today

The NANC Number Portability Working Group is proposing to give the LLCs a continuing role even after the local number portability administrator has been selected. It is recommending to NANC that each LNPA “be established under the Regional LLC” and that the LLC “manage” the LNPA. This specifically includes “ongoing direction of the third party’s activities,” ensuring that the prices charged by the LNPA are consistent with Commission directives and prioritizing the LNPA’s work efforts. See Arch & Admin Plan ¶¶ 12.2.1-2.

This is inconsistent with the Commission’s *Order*. The Commission directed that the LNPAs be “neutral third parties,” in particular, that they must be “independent, non-governmental entities that are not aligned with any particular telecommunications industry segment.” *Number Portability Order* ¶¶ 92, 93. The LNPAs selected by the LLCs fit this bill. However, the total arrangement is not impartial if the LNPA is “established under,” is “managed” by and is accountable on a day-to-day basis to a joint venture of telecommunications carriers.

The language the Commission used to describe the impartiality of the LNPAs is the same as it had used to describe the new NANPA in paragraph 57 of the *Number Administration Order*. This indicates that the same degree of independence and freedom from industry influence is required for LNPAs as for the new NANPA. If it would not be consistent with the Commission’s direction (or with section 251(e)(1) of the Communications Act) for the new NANPA to be “managed” by a joint venture of telecommunications carriers, then it is not consistent with the Commission’s direction to establish the LNPAs in that way either.

The Tariffing Issue

The LLCs have been proceeding on the assumption that the LNPAs they select will enter into contracts with the various carriers for SMS services. When the FCC considered a service identical to this one (the SMS for 800 service), it found that it was a common carrier communications service that had to be offered under tariff. The reasons given in

that order for requiring the tariffing of 800 SMS apply equally to number portability SMS services:

The service is "incidental to the provision of" a service under Commission jurisdiction and "is absolutely necessary to the provision of" that service.

The entity providing the service "is under a legal compulsion to hold itself out indiscriminately to the clientele it is suited to serve."

The "importance of ensuring that SMS access is provided at reasonable rates and on nondiscriminatory terms, and because of the untried nature of the proposed alternative mechanisms for achieving these goals."

Provision of Access for 800 Service, CC Dkt. 86-10, Order ¶¶ 27-29 (rel. Feb. 10, 1993).

Bell Atlantic needs access to LNPA services in Maryland to comply with that State commission's number portability implementation plan, even before we need access under the Commission's schedule. When we called the regional LNPA to begin contract negotiations, we were told that the LLC had instructed that Bell Atlantic could not begin these discussions until the LLC had finalized a "User Agreement" with the LNPA and that we would be expected to sign that Agreement. (MCI has told two state commissions that Bell Atlantic's attempt to negotiate with the LNPA "may violate the FCC's LNP Order.") If LNPA access is going to be offered on this non-negotiable basis, then it is the Commission that should oversee the terms, not a joint venture of carriers.

Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C. 20554

FOC 93-84

In the Matter of

Provision of Access
for 800 Service

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CC Docket No. 86-10

Order

Adopted: February 10, 1993

Released: February 10, 1993

By the Commission:

I. Introduction

1. On June 19, 1992, the Competitive Telecommunications Association (CompTel) filed a petition for declaratory ruling on three issues relating to 800 data base service. We now rule that: (1) "area-of-service routing," which is the routing of 800 calls by local exchange carriers (LECs) to different interexchange carriers (IXCs) based on the local access transport area (LATA) in which the call originates, is a part of basic 800 access, rather than an optional vertical feature; (2) access to the Service Management System (SMS) by Responsible Organizations (RESPORGs) is a Title II common carrier service and shall be provided pursuant to tariff; and (3) any entity that meets appropriate financial and technical eligibility requirements may serve as RESPORG for an 800 number record at the customer's request.

II. Background

2. 800 service is an interexchange service in which a subscriber agrees in advance to pay for all calls made to its 800 number from a specified area. LECs must handle originating 800 access differently from originating access for ordinary interexchange calls because the LECs must route 800 calls to the carrier selected by the 800 service subscriber (the called party), rather than the carrier presubscribed to the originating line or chosen by the calling party.

3. LECs currently provide originating 800 access through the so-called "NXX" screening methodology. Under this system, LECs identify the IXC by reading the three digits (the NXX digits) that immediately follow the 800 prefix of the called number. Consequently, the NXX system does not permit 800 number portability -- that is, 800 service subscribers cannot switch carriers without changing their 800 numbers.

4. The Bell Operating Companies (BOCs), along with the Independent Telephone Companies (ITCs), will soon replace the NXX access system with a new "data base" system of 800 access. LECs will implement this data base system by linking their common channel signaling, or SS7, networks with data

specifically addressed this issue. Moreover, AT&T's assertion that the Commission has defined basic features of 800 access as those features that are a "virtual prerequisite" to the provision of 800 service mischaracterizes the Commission's 1989 Report and Order. The discussion in that order cited by AT&T did not address whether features are basic or vertical, but, rather, whether LECs should be permitted to offer vertical features as a part of 800 access, and if so, to whom. In concluding that LECs should be permitted to offer POTS translation service to IXCs, the Commission noted that POTS translation is a virtual necessity for IXCs wishing to enter the 800 market. Indeed, the Commission's conclusion that POTS translation, a vertical feature, is a "virtual prerequisite" to the provision of 800 service is inconsistent with AT&T's claim that the Commission has defined basic services as those that are virtual prerequisites to providing 800 service.⁴⁷

B. SMS Access

19. The SMS is the centralized data base system that provides a national coordinated system for the assignment of 800 numbers, the entry of 800 customer records, and the loading of customer records into regional data bases (SCPs) owned and operated by the LECs. The SMS is administered by the 800 Number Administration and Service Center (NASC), which Bellcore has administered since 1989.²⁸ In response to concerns about Bellcore's role as NASC administrator, however, the BOCs and Bellcore have agreed to transfer responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the NASC from Bellcore to a neutral third party. For each 800 number, only one entity, the RESPORG, will have authority to access the SMS in order to input or change service information with respect to that number. The BOCs and Bellcore currently plan to charge the RESPORG for this access to the SMS. The BOCs have proposed that these charges be based on a contractual relationship between the SMS administrator and each RESPORG.

1. CompTel Petition

20. CompTel asks the Commission to require that SMS access be tariffed.²⁹ CompTel states that the SMS administrator is a monopoly service provider and that access to the SMS is necessary to the provision of 800 service. CompTel also asserts that the contract proposed by Bellcore for SMS access contains numerous onerous provisions.

²⁷ Provision of Access for 800 Service, Report and Order, 4 FCC Rcd 2824, 2830 (1989).

²⁸ See letter from Marie Breslin, Director, FCC Relations, Bell Atlantic, to Donna Searcy, Secretary, FCC, May 22, 1992. The industry uses the terms NASC administrator and SMS administrator interchangeably to refer to the same entity. Technically, the SMS is the data base system itself; the NASC is the operations center that administers the SMS on a day-to-day basis.

²⁹ CompTel Petition at 11-13.

2. Positions of the Parties

21. Virtually all commenters other than the BOCs and AT&T support CompTel's request.³⁰ These parties echo the reasons cited by CompTel, arguing generally that the tariffing of SMS access is the only way the Commission can ensure that this essential service is provided on just, reasonable, and nondiscriminatory terms to all 800 service providers.

22. AT&T, however, takes the position that SMS access should be offered under contract, asserting that the contract process is more responsive to customer needs, will hold costs down, and will facilitate transfer of control of the SMS to a third party. AT&T says that the Commission's oversight responsibility will be sufficient to guard against discriminatory treatment and unreasonable charges.³¹

23. BOCs assert that the SMS administrator provides "administrative functions," not common carrier services.³² They state that Bellcore would offer the same contract to every RESPOG and would be willing to file that contract with the FCC.³³ They also offer to establish a board of directors composed of a cross-section of industry representatives to oversee the NASC.³⁴ BOCs also argue that it may be impractical to file tariffs in time to meet the data base implementation deadline.³⁵

24. The BOC proposal to establish an industry-based board of directors with authority over the SMS administrator does not satisfy some IXC's.³⁶ They express concern that some IXC's would not be adequately represented on such a board and that unless SMS access were treated as a Title II service, the Commission would be unable to address discrimination or other problems that might arise in the administration of the SMS. Some parties also argue that

³⁰ Ad Hoc Comments at 12-13; Allnet Comments at 8; ARINC Comments at 4-5; Cable & Wireless Comments at 4-6; ICA Comments at 5; ITN Comments at 5-6; LDDS Comments at 4; LinkUSA Comments at 2; MCI Comments at 3-4; Metromedia Comments at 2-3; Sprint Comments at 1-6; USLink Comments at 1; Wiltel Comments at 5-6.

³¹ Ex parte letter from Karen Weis, Division Manager, Federal Regulatory Affairs, AT&T to Donna Searcy, Secretary, FCC, December 29, 1992.

³² Bell Companies Comments at 4-5; USTA Comments at 3-4.

³³ Bell Companies Comments at 7.

³⁴ Id. at 8. See also letter from Marie Breslin, Director, FCC Relations, Bell Atlantic, to Donna Searcy, Secretary, FCC, March 13, 1992.

³⁵ Bell Companies Comments at 4; SWBT Comments at 5.

³⁶ See, e.g., Sprint Reply at 4-5; MCI Reply at 6.

an industry board, composed of selected industry members, with authority to establish SMS policies and/or prices, would violate federal antitrust laws.

3. Discussion

25. We find that, under the current BOC plans for providing SMS access, SMS access is a Title II common carrier service that should be offered pursuant to tariff. We conclude further, based on how SMS access will be provided, that the BOCs should file the necessary tariff.

26. The determination of the jurisdictional status of SMS access hinges upon two questions: (1) is SMS access an interstate or foreign communications service under section 3(a) of the Communications Act, which defines communications services to include not only the transmission of signals by wire or radio, but also all services incidental to such transmission; and (2) if so, is it a common carrier service, under section 3(h) of the Act?

27. With regard to the first question, in view of the broad language of section 3(a), we think it is reasonable to find that access to the SMS falls under that provision. Specifically, we find that SMS access is incidental to the provision of 800 access services. The data input into the SMS derive from the provision of 800 access service. More significantly, SMS access is absolutely necessary to the provision of 800 service using the data base access system. IXCs do not have the option of providing 800 service information directly to each individual LEC or to each LEC with its own data base; the information can only be loaded through the SMS. Thus, SMS access is technically necessary to the provision of 800 access service, and is incidental to the provision of such access.³⁷

28. With regard to the second question, we find that the better course at present is to treat SMS access as a common carrier service under section 3(h) of the Act. If an entity is placed under a legal compulsion to hold itself out indiscriminately to the clientele it is suited to serve, it is a common carrier under NARUC I.³⁸ Some parties argue that SMS access need not be treated as a common carrier service and tariffed under Title II because Bellcore will transfer administration of the SMS to a neutral third party in order to safeguard against discrimination by the SMS administrator. In addition, the BOCs argue that they have proposed to establish a board of directors composed of a cross-section of industry representatives to oversee the NASC.³⁹ Thus, customers may be able to represent themselves adequately

³⁷ See Policies and Rules Concerning Local Exchange Carrier Validation and Billing Information for Joint Use Calling Cards, Report and Order and Request for Supplemental Comment, 7 FCC 3528 (1992) (Calling Card Validation Order).

³⁸ NARUC v. FCC, 525 F.2d 630 (D.C. Cir. 1976), cert. denied, 425 U.S. 999.

³⁹ Bell Companies Comments at 8; GTE Comments at 3.

in dealings with the SMS service provider without requiring that SMS access be provided as a common carrier service.

29. On balance, however, we find that the better course for now is to require that SMS access be tariffed as a Title II service. We reach this conclusion in light of the importance of ensuring that SMS access is provided at reasonable rates and on nondiscriminatory terms, and because of the untried nature of the proposed alternative mechanisms for achieving these goals. While transferring administration of the SMS to a neutral third party may reduce incentives for discrimination in the day-to-day operation of the SMS, it is not clear at this point that this transfer will sufficiently reduce our concerns about possible discrimination in the provision of this monopoly service.⁴⁰ Nor does the proposal for an industry board of directors sufficiently address our concerns in this area. We note that the industry has not yet agreed on the makeup of any such board or on the powers that it would be granted. Moreover, some IXCs have expressed concern that their interests would not be well represented by an industry board and that there may be federal antitrust problems in establishing an industry board with authority to affect prices or policies. Because SMS access is necessary to the provision of 800 service under the data base system, it is essential that SMS access be provided on a nondiscriminatory basis and at reasonable rates. At this time, we believe that the service must be tariffed to ensure both these goals are met.

30. Having determined that SMS access should be tariffed, we now turn to the question of who should file those tariffs. As described above, the centralized SMS is the means by which SCP data base owners obtain the data necessary for them to provide 800 access service under the data base system. The BOCs, through Bellcore, have designed and developed the SMS for the use of the industry and will provide the SMS software, software maintenance and enhancement services, and billing and collection services. Southwestern Bell has provided the computer that will run the SMS software and the facilities in which the SMS will be housed. Bellcore, as the NASC, will initially administer the SMS on a day-to-day basis. Subsequently, however, the BOCs will subcontract NASC responsibilities to an independent third party because of the industry's desire to divorce the BOCs and Bellcore from the daily administration of the SMS. This independent third party will receive a set fee for its administrative services, which will be largely ministerial in nature. This fee will represent its only payment for its services; it will receive no share in the overall revenues from the SMS operation. The BOCs and Bellcore will retain general control over this operation, including the establishment of rates and SMS software development.⁴¹

⁴⁰ See Expanded Interconnection with Local Telephone Company Facilities, 7 FCC Rcd 7369 at 7443-47 (1992); Calling Card Validation Order, supra, 7 FCC Rcd at 3532.

⁴¹ See, e.g., letter from Anthony M. Alessi, Director -- Federal Regulatory, Ameritech, to Donna Searcy, Secretary, FCC, January 28, 1993; letter from Marie Breslin, Director, FCC Relations, Bell Atlantic, to Donna Searcy, Secretary, FCC, March 13, 1992. See also 800 Data Base Access

31. Under these circumstances, we believe that the BOCs should file the SMS tariff. Through Bellcore, the BOCs control all fundamental aspects of SMS access. The third-party administrator, on the other hand, is merely a subcontractor with ministerial caretaking responsibilities performed on behalf of the BOCs and Bellcore. We further direct that the BOCs file a single joint tariff, or that one BOC file a tariff in which the others concur, for this service. Since there is only one SMS, there should be a single tariff for SMS access. This tariff should contain SMS prices, terms, and conditions, including eligibility requirements for RESPOrgs and rules governing RESPOrg responsibilities, and should be filed by March 5, 1993.

C. RESPORG Eligibility

1. CompTel Petition

32. CompTel asks that the Commission clarify that any entity, including LECs and third parties, may act as a RESPOrg on behalf of a provider of 800 services.⁴² CompTel asserts that many small IXCs may lack the resources necessary to serve as RESPOrgs. CompTel says that these IXCs will be unable to serve as customers' RESPOrgs, or they will have to rely on other entities to provide RESPOrg services for them. CompTel urges that the Commission afford these IXCs the broadest possible range of choices for RESPOrg service. Specifically, CompTel asks that any IXC be permitted to delegate RESPOrg responsibilities to any entity it chooses, including a LEC or a user. CompTel argues that this choice would bring the benefits of greater competition to RESPOrg services and enable IXCs to obtain the best possible RESPOrg services at the best possible prices. CompTel also claims that this would free small IXCs from having to rely on their IXC competitors for RESPOrg services, which, CompTel notes, would place small IXCs in the position of having to provide sensitive customer information to their competitors.

2. Positions of the Parties

33. Users support CompTel's petition and, in fact, advocate even broader RESPOrg eligibility.⁴³ Users urge that they be able to serve as their own RESPOrgs, even if they are not so designated by an 800 service provider.⁴⁴ Users argue that this would provide them with greater control

Service Implementation Plan, March 2, 1992, pp. 32-34.

⁴² CompTel Petition at 9-11.

⁴³ Ad Hoc Comments at 10-12; ARINC Comments at 4; First Financial Reply at 4-6; ICA Comments at 4; National Data Comments at 4-6.

⁴⁴ National Data Comments at 4-6.